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AN  
ADDRESS  
TO THE  
ROMAN CATHOLICS  
OF  
IRELAND,  
ON THE  
CONDUCT THEY SHOULD PURSUE  
AT THE  
PRESENT CRISIS;  
ON THE  
SUBJECT  
OF AN  
UNION.

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BY AN OLD FRIEND.

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**I** HEARD with disgust a few days ago, a man presume to pronounce what he called the ascertained sentiments of the Roman Catholics. He stated, that the Catholics were unanimous in favour of an Union, and that their motive was this, *that as they had failed in their attempt to elevate themselves to the political privileges of the Protestants, they were determined to have the satisfaction of seeing the Protestants brought down to their own level.* In an enlightened and liberal assembly, that declaration was received with universal indignation; for it imputed to you sentiments which are infatuation, and motives which are diabolical, and the contradiction and reprimand to which the asserter was obliged to submit, gave general satisfaction. I do not now address you, in the fear that so abandoned a calumny had the smallest foundation in



truth; I do not exhort you to a general and manly co-operation in resisting the ruinous project of an Union, with all the virtuous and public spirited of your countrymen of all persuasions, from the slightest apprehension, that you have ever warranted the foul slander uttered against you; for if I felt such apprehensions, I would tremble at the thought of your alliance, and deprecate your co-operation. But I address you as the great body of Irishmen, and implore you to consider seriously and anxiously the fate which threatens your country, and not suffer any mean resentment or feminine jealousy to prevent you from averting it. This is no time for personal or secondary feelings, the great cause of your country is equally before all descriptions of Irishmen, and I behold already with pleasure, good resulting from evil, and this desperate enterprise of government, promising the absorption of all our intestine and deplorable dissensions in one generous oblivion of the past, and in one vigorous and patriotic combination in defence of the liberties of this land.

The public have been already appealed to, and you have had the opportunity of seeing this projected Revolution canvassed and examined; it is not necessary, therefore, to exhibit to you here, the folly, the treachery and danger of the measure, I shall only, in a word or two, remind you of its particular relation to yourselves. You have long desired to participate in the Constitution of your country  
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and is it possible you can be duped into acquiescence or neutrality, upon a measure which is specifically recommended to your enemies, upon the exclusive merits of silencing your pretensions for ever. Read the work of the ministerial advocate for an Union, that work which introduced this subject to the nation, and observe his account of the state of your claims at this moment; observe him seeking to terrify your Protestant-brethren by the pertinacity of your expectations, and observe in their unanimous indignation, that your Protestant brethren are not terrified by him. "Whilst Ireland continues a separate kingdom, the Catholics will not drop their claims, nor the argument of numbers in their favour. So far from dropping their claims, they have already renewed them; and the Catholics of Waterford, in an address to the Lord Lieutenant, have repeated their demand for political equality, and advanced it on a plea of merit. They have still, and will ever have, electioneering partizans in parliament, and speculative advocates in England, to feed their hopes, and they will be supported by every open opposer and secret ill-wisher to the government." You may take the word of the Author—his position is too obvious and plain to be affected by his authority, and it is true, though he has said it. An Union must be the extinction of your hopes—Until that political death overshadows you, your pretensions as they did before, may  
work



work their own way; time must at last heal the lacerations of the public mind; the human intellect naturally advances to justice and liberality in spite of casual interruption; the activity of the bad passions fatigues itself, and bigotry and uncharitableness are tyrants of the heart, which do not reign for ever. A new ministry, a new Parliament, a peace, a great event, or a slight change may each, or all decide upon your ultimate success. But learn from the ministerial oracle, that an Union is the grave of your hopes, beyond which there is no redemption, Learn also from him the maturity of your cause at this moment, and that the fruit is ready to drop into your hands, unless the tree be cut up by the roots. "Who  
 " will be a guarantee of the Protestant Ascendancy, and whom will it content? A  
 " party of Protestants in Ireland term it unjust  
 " and absurd; another party in England term  
 " it by fouler names; great leaders in opposition, possibly the future ministers of England, may condemn it; and some members  
 " of the British Cabinet are supposed to be  
 " adverse to it. Its stability may rest upon  
 " accident, upon the death of a *single* character upon the change of a Minister, on the  
 " temper of a Lord Lieutenant, AND THE POLICY OF THIS SYSTEM IS MUCH DOUBTED  
 " BY THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND." I do protest to God, whether I consider the natural tendency of the measure itself, or the principles and declarations of its promoters, I am at  
 a loss

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a loss to see any one object which it must so completely effectuate as the permanent subjugation of the Roman Catholics of Ireland. And what is hinted to you as the premium for this eternal surrender? The pensioning of your Clergy, in dependence upon Government, and an intimation that in the new order of things *some open may be left for you*. And yet, you would be disgusted if you knew the language which this very Government, who have thus acted by you, and written of you, speak now in the hopes of your preserving a sulky neutrality upon this great national question. (I speak not of Lord Cornwallis, when I mention the Government—his conduct to you, and to Ireland, has been magnanimous.) It little avails, (say your old task masters,) what the Bar, or the mercantile community, or the city of Dublin may declare; the Catholics have not yet spoken, and theirs is the voice of the people. Alas! Catholics, can it be for good, that the men call you *the people* to-day, who yesterday denied that you were so, and to-morrow will treat you as if you were not so? Depend upon it, they seek to make *your* resentments, at which they will laugh hereafter, the instruments of *their* politics; but I rely upon you for a different conduct, and expect that you will set the example of a magnanimous forgetfulness of every thing but the honour of your native land. This conduct will reclaim the prejudices of thousands, and the liberality which you practise, you will inspire.

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If you are not to be moved by superior considerations, I would in vain appeal to you for consistency, yet I cannot but remind you that in the year 1795, when the recall of Lord Fitzwilliam snatched your hopes from your grasp, the Catholics of Dublin, in a numerous and most respectable meeting at Francis-Street Chapel, unanimously resolved "*that they would not accept of Emancipation upon the terms of an Union.*"

He who takes the liberty of thus addressing you, is one of that party of Protestants in Ireland, who, (as the Secretary has told you) thinks your exclusion from the Constitution unjust and absurd. He has always thought so. Many years ago, tho' an humble and obscure man, he asserted through the press, the justice of your pretensions, even in the infancy of your demands:—He sought no emolumental reward, and denied himself even the pardonable indulgence of reputation. He looks forward steadily to the same object, and relies confidently for its accomplishment upon the progressive illumination of the human mind. He hopes to see his countrymen of all persuasions, one great, prosperous, happy, and loyal nation, and he trusts that the Catholics of Ireland will not contribute to its becoming a degraded and divided province.

AN OLD FRIEND.

December, 20th, 1798.

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